

GROSSE ILE - "FINAL
Elizabeth P. REPORT"
Gannon ←
F548.8.C9.m5 1985

FINAL REPORT

GROSSE ILE CUSTOMS HOUSE

LRP 8E-1.3

Final Report

LRP 8E-1.3

FY.1985-86

A HISTORY OF THE CUSTOMS HOUSE AND THE GROSSE ILE HISTORICAL SOCIETY Elizabeth P. Gannon

The Grosse Ile Historical Society is located on the site of the old Canadian Southern Railroad property, later owned by Michigan Central Railroad, on the corner of Parkway Road (the former bed of the railroad track) and East River Road. We are situated facing Canada, our neighbor to the East, on Grosse Ile island at the South end of the Detroit River where it enters Lake Erie. Grosse Ile was a summer hunting ground for the Patowammi Indians and afforded access to the Detroit River and Canada. LaMothe de La Cadillac considered Grosse Ile as his site for the new Fort Detroit and admired the property so much that he claimed ownership for himself and left the land to his daughter, Margarett, in his last will and testament. He decided that an island would too soon run out of wood for fuel and so changed his plans to build the fort here and selected the site further North on the river, which is now the center of downtown Detroit. Cadillac fell out of favor with Louis XIV and was transferred to New Orleans about eight years after establishing the Fort in Detroit in 1701. Grosse Ile remained under French rule until 1760 when they surrendered Detroit and this area to Major Robert Rogers and his Rangers.

On July 6, 1779, Alexander and William Macomb bought Grosse Ile from the Potawatomi Indians. Development of the island was delayed because of the Revolutionary War. In 1783, the Treaty of Paris placed Grosse Ile on the American side of the international bounday, but the British did not leave Detroit and continued in possession of that village and Grosse Ile as well as other land in the west. On July 11, 1796, the British evacuated Detroit, and Grosse Ile came under United States rule. The last Indians to live on the island in encampment, were induced to leave, although we do have descendants of those Indians still living and working on Grosse Ile. The survey by Aaron Greeley for the United States in 1808 established the Macomb title for the land. Because of the contining problems with the British and the Indians, a fort was built on East River Road, not far from the Historical Society property, in 1815, to protect the island. The stockade was abandoned in 1819.

The Macomb brothers began selling some of their land, roads were laid out and farmers began working the land. At that time the only way to Grosse Ile was by boat or ferry. A number of docks on the East, West, North and South of the island were built to accomodate increasingly larger vessels. Schools and churches were established. One historic church stands close to the Historical Society property. It is the St. James Episcopal Chapel, built initially because of the bequest of a black woman, Lizette Dennison, who was born to slavery, became free, and worked all her life for the prominent Biddle family of New York, Washington, and Wyandotte. The chapel was consecrated on July 9, 1868. This is always included on our historic tours around the island, and is well-known for its beautiful Tiffany Glass window.

In 1871, the Canadian Southern Railroad built bridges to Grosse Ile from the United States mainland, and thence to Stony Island for the purpose of bringing cattle, goods and passengers from West of Chicago to New York, through Canada. The cars were ferried from Stony Island to the Canadian shore. They built a Customs House, a railroad station, boarding houses for workmen and visitors and numbers of outbuildings necessary to the maintenance of the Line.

Because of the treacherous ice at this point in the river, the line proved unprofitable so the business was moved North to Detroit and Canadian Southern sold their holding to Michigan Central Railroad. Michigan Central did not need a Customs House so it was moved over to Macomb Street, about a mile away, directly through the farmers fields. There it served as a Pool Hall, a Barber Shop, a Boarding House, and Ice Cream Parlor and legend has it also as a house of ill repute for a short time.

Michigan Central tore down the original train station and built a new one up off the tracks on a hill in 1901.

In the late nineteenth century Grosse Ile became a fashionable place for the well-to-do of Detroit to spend their summers. The train came to the Island in the morning and evening so the business men could take it to work in Detroit while their families enjoyed the water and society of Grosse Ile. There were several fine hotels erected and in 1899 a golf course was laid out and a Casino built. This was in the area of the Historic District. Transportation at that time was by horse-driven carriages or buses and often bob-sleds were used when the roads were covered with snow. Ownership of the property and train station reverted to Wayne County. In 1924, passenger service was discontinued by the railroad and later the railroad bridge and the railroad bed were converted into the Wayne County Free Bridge and the Parkway Road. The Train Station was used for a number of purposes including a sub-police station, a school house and Water Supply Commission.

The automobile became very popular so in 1913 the Grosse Ile Toll Bridge was opened to traffic on Thanksgiving Day at the North end of the Island. This bridge is still in use.

In 1959 the Grosse Ile Historical Society was formed and after several years, persuaded Grosse Ile Township and Wayne County, to allow them to lease the property for \$1.00 per year plus extensive insurance coverage for the County. At that time the Station had fallen into a dreadful state of neglect and disrepair. With a great deal of effort and donations, the charming Station (started in 1901) was restored and became the center of Historical Society activities and efforts. The marvelous collection housed in this building has been commended by the Michigan State Historical Society as outstanding because it is a collection of memorabilia concerning life and times on Grosse Ile, not just a collection of old things. The collection became so extensive that we ran out of room and began to decline acquisitions. We searched for ways to obtain more display room. An architect designed a building that would have cost well over \$100,000.00. In 1976 we raised \$30,000.00 for a new building, but even with matching grants this would not cover the cost of a new building.

Then in 1978, when I became President of Historical Society after serving on the Board of Directors for several years, Historical Society was offered a building which was then being used by Peoples Bank and Trust for a temporary office while they built a new modern bank building. Through the years preceeding this event, the actual history and background of the building had been forgotten. When the building was offered we began to research this functional but ordinary looking building which had been unfortunately "modernized" through the years. It was covered with asbestos shingles, aluminum awnings, contemporary aluminum windows, etc. Our then local newspaper editor, Meg Bremmer Jones, investigated and discovered that this was the Old U.S. Customs House that had been moved from the Railroad Property to the site on Macomb Street. We had oral history and a letter from the daughter of a woman 103 years old who remembered the building on the original site and when it had been moved, when she was a little girl. Historical architects and builders investigated the construction to confirm the age of the building, and that it had been moved. In our restoration we revealed the original cedar siding, removed the "modernization" and exposed a charming nineteenth century building, which we eventually restored using comparable buildings of Grosse Ile as our guide, and with the help of our architect, Mr. John Lee. The Board of Directors voted to accept the building if the \$30,000.00 previously raised would be allowed to be used to help move the building back to its original site on the hill above the original Canadian Railroad track site, now converted to Parkway Road.

It was also necessary to obtain permission from Wayne County to extend our Lease holding to include this property and a parking area, build a foundation and place the Customs House on the grounds of the Historical Society land. The property was already registered as a State of Michigan and a National Historic Site.

The building had been abused and "modernized". I contacted the office of then Governor Milliken and through their help make contact with Department of Natural Resources Coastal Zone Management and then Senator James DeSana. With the help of these three offices in Michigan State Government, we received Grant money to provide for the services of Ayres, Lewis and May, Architects, for historical drawings for the restoration of the Customs House. We also received funds for the foundation on which to set the building after the move, which had to be made within three months. Also it was necessary to somehow make contact with the elusive Wayne County Road Commission, then under the administration of Michael Berry. Contact with Mr. Berry was made and permission to present our request for additional land and erection of the Customs House was given. U.S. Customs had a directive issued to assist in the preservation of Customs Houses with the help of the Director of U.S. Customs in Detroit, Lou Mazzano, a business contact of my husband. This was accomplished within three weeks after being given the Customs House. I presented our proposal to the full monthly meeting of the Wayne County Road Commission Board and did not receive their permission but I was able to persuade them to take the proposal under consideration. Within a month, after many phone calls, letters, home-made Rum cakes, etc., I finally again received permission to appear before their Board and at that time Wayne County Road Commission did agree to lease the extra land to us and allow the Customs House to be moved there. The Grosse Ile Township Board, which is largely Republican, while Wayne County was largely Democratic, were amazed that this was accomplished. Actually, I found the Road Commission very cooperative when they realized that Grosse Ile Historical Society is completely non-partisan and only trying to accomplish something that would be of benefit to Grosse Ile, Wayne County and the State of Michigan. This we have proven to be true. Our yearly attendance has increased steadily during the following years. I found all the offices mentioned above to be most gracious, cooperative and willing to go out of their way to help diligently to see our projects completed as projected.

On our own we raised additional money and with that, the Grant from DNR/CZM, some Grosse Ile Township Revenue Sharing and a great deal of volunteer labor and effort, we were able to dedicate the completed Customs House in October of 1980. Membership in Historical Society is now around 350. Our only income is from dues and the rental of an apartment on the second floor of the Customs House, and rental of our building for parties and craft sales. We also make money doing bus tours of our buildings and other Historical sites on Grosse Ile, using the services of our volunteer members. With these funds we maintain our two buildings, pay a considerable fee for insurance and service the community with tours. These tours include all the fourth grade classes from the Grosse Ile School and many from Trenton schools as well. These children then give reports of their experience. We average at least fourteen bus tours (50 people per bus) a year. We are open every Sunday except during January and February and on holidays, for exhibition to the general public. We also offer research privileges for individual or group projects.

In March of 1985, I applied again to the Department of Natural Resources Coastal Zone Management for a grant to enlarge our parking facilities to accomodate 40 cars since we have become quite popular as a tour site. Also when we have special programs, the general public has had to park illegally along the road in order to attend. We also needed to re-stain the Customs House, as recommended by the original architectural firm to do after the first five years. We also had two Detroit River Lighthouse Buoys, which had been in service since the end of the Nineteenth Century, donated to our collection. These buoys needed foundations and a site. We also needed funds for landscaping, plants, material and fencing repair in the parking lot area, plus costs of profes-

sional drawings by an engineering firm to meet Grosse Ile Township codes for the parking lot. The estimated costs for these projects was \$15,500.00. We were delighted that our request was granted, with a 50% match to our 50% cash and "in kind" services.

The original plan was to move a Detroit Edison power pole that is situated in the middle of our original parking area, creating almost an "island," severely limiting our use of the parking area. The cost for this move would have been \$3,500.00. After an inspection by CZM/DNR, it was suggested that we extend our projected parking area to the West and landscape the Power Pole area to continue the existing garden on the West side of the building. I again contacted Wayne County, which had reorganized the Road Commission into Wayne County Roads, Parks and Planning.

After many telephone calls and letters I at last made contact with Ms. Nancy Watkins, chief of Parks and Planning. Wayne County is divesting itself of some of its holding and we have been able to negotiate the transfer of actual ownership of the Historical Society leased property, and additional property all the way West to Old Depot Siding Road, to the Grosse Ile Historical Society. We will actually own, instead of lease, approximately 1000 feet of property extending from East River Road to Old Dept Siding, along Parkway Road, the former bed of the old railroad tracks, and now one of the busiest and most attractive roads on Grosse Ile.

Since Grosse Ile Township officials refused to handle the paper work and money for the Grant, CZM/DNR agreed that it could be handled by the President, Dr. Dimitry Turin, and myself, Elizabeth Gannon, Chairman of Forward Planning, and past President, Board of Directors, Grosse Ile Historical Society. The Official Reports were to be made quarterly.

In the first quarter (January to March 30, 1986) we had conferences with Grosse Ile Township Administrator, Mr. Feccho; with the Wayne County Road Department, Mr. Oakley; with Mr. William Heinrich, Marine Engineer, regarding placement of Light Channel Buoy Markers; Michigan Foundation for the parking lot work; took bids from professional painters, ordered and received paint, brushes, etc.; conferred with the Grosse Ile Garden Club and made arrangements for them to repair and stain existing fencing and work on gardens now existing; had a conference with Mr. Charles Raines on the site to have Certified drawings made of parking lot and placement of the Lighthouse buoys; arrange for publicity in local papers, and conferred often with Ms. Jeannette Bailey of CZM/DNR regarding administration of Grant. Our original plan was to have volunteer painters from the Lions Club do the staining, using scaffolding. We later decided that it was safer to just hire professional painters to do the work. The actual cost of \$300.00 offset the cost of renting the scaffolding. The painter donated "in kind" services valued at \$250.00. The Grosse Ile Lions Club agreed to stain the lower part of the building with our stain. Later they decided instead to donate \$500.00 to Historical Society to pay a professional painter to complete all the re-staining, including shutters and porches, using our stain, purchased at cost from N.A. Mans. They donated the difference in retail price as part of our "in kind" match.

The charge for the drawing from Charles Raines Engineering Co. was \$500.00. We paid an additional \$250.00 to have survey stakes put in for final grading.

The estimate for the entire new parking lot, gravel, grading, fill, regarding existing lot between the Customs House and the Old Train Depot and regarding one long driveway from East River and enlarging another driveway from Parkway was \$10,000.00. We received an "in kind" gift of fill and trucking of \$3,000.00 from Ron Davidson of American Concrete Breaking, an affiliate of Michigan Foundation, and the actual cost of the work to us was \$7,000.00. We are withholding \$500.00 of Historical Society funds from American Concrete Breaking, with their agreement, so that they will give us a final grading job in June of 1987 as recommended by the Grosse Ile Town-

ship Building Inspector, Mr. Sligay, and two engineers who are volunteers for the Historical Society. This is necessary because of the unusual record-breaking amount of rain (27 days in a row) in September 1986, creating soggy land. This will firm up during the winter and spring to a nice hard surface. All of this property has special drains installed to let water from adjoining property, flowing onto our property, drain off to the main road drain along Parkway Road to our North.

In the second quarter, April 1 to June 30, we continued our conferences with Jeanette Bailey, the Township, Wayne County, met with Nancy Watkins of Wayne County, Bill Heinrich, Marine Engineer who agreed to donate his services to supervise the installation of the two lighthouse buoys; the Garden Club, the painters, and landscaping men. Since we already had a permit for our parking lot from our work before, we instructed Mr. Ron Davidson to begin our fill, gravel, and grading work per specifications on Mr. Raines' drawings.

At that point, our adjoining neighbors objected to the Township because actually they did not want us to have a parking lot. They still had not moved in to the new house they were having built to our south property line. They seemed to think that the property should be for them to look at or use, since they thought it belonged to Wayne County, not knowing that it was leased to the Historical Society and actually in the legal process of being transferred to us as owners. The actual site of our parking lot has been used as a parking area since the 1950's when the original lessee was Mr. Gronda, who operated a boat livery along the Detroit River off East River Road. There is still an old sign nailed to the Catalpa tree at the far West end of our new parking lot that says, "for Boat Livery parking only."

Another of the neighbors' complaints was that our parking lot would not allow their property to drain properly. Their house is the lowest in the new subdivision. They claim that our lot caused water to stand on their lot. We discovered that they actually had a sump pump that came from their basement directly to our property line that on a regular basis pumped water onto our property. They did have water standing on their lot. (See enclosed pictures of their sump pump drain to our lot.)

Because of the neighbors' objections, the Township put a stop work order on our project, and it was necessary for us to go to the Planning Commission to request permission for another permit to install our new parking lot. We had quite a time at the meeting. The neighbors gathered all their adjoining neighbors who came to the meeting to try to prevent us from having a parking lot at all. They complained about our bus tours, lights, etc. Actually, we are very good neighbors. We keep our property in perfect, neat, and attractive condition. Our lawns and gardens are tended properly and our buildings are kept in good repair. We allow no trash to accumulate, etc. We perform a desirable service and are much respected by the entire community of Grosse Ile except for our adjoining neighbors. Of course, we were there way before any of those neighbors purchased their property, so it was no secret that we operated a museum and needed parking facilities. After much talking, threats by the neighbors of an injunction in Circuit Court, etc., reason prevailed with the Planning Commission and we were granted a new permit. However, Grosse Ile code required a business lot to be paved with concrete or asphalt which would have cost way more than we could have ever afforded to match in a grant. So we had to arrange to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals. Again, the neighbors mobilized, but we did too. We requested a letter from DCN/DNR encouraging the Board of Appeals to grant us the variance. We also arranged for Ms. Watkins, Director of Wayne County Parks, to appear to testify in our behalf. The neighbors had been extremely abusive to me personally at the first meeting and tried to be intimidating at this one.

We were granted the variance appeal but then the neighbors still complained to the Board of Appeals because there existed another public parking code that required a six and one-half foot fence adjoining private property for a business parking lot. The neighbors were delighted. First, they knew we did not have enough money for the block fence, 170 feet long, and second, they knew we would not think that this would be attractive. The neighbors said they insisted on the block fence to the Planning Commission, and in private conference with Dr. Turin and myself, said that after the fence was built, they would spray graffiti all over it if we did get it built. Our original plans for the parking lot included planting evergreen Arborvitae along our neighbors' adjoining line as we did along the original parking area where we adjoined.

The neighbors said that the evergreen Arborvitae, planted at a height above car lights, would not be enough to screen their back yards from lights. We probably have five meetings a year when the lights might shine into their yard between 7:30 and 10:00 p.m., way less that if we were private residential property with drivers going in and out every day. Finally, at the second Board of Appeals meeting, after many drawings and bids, we offered to plant on a three foot drained berm, six foot high evergreen Arborvitae along the inside of our line and construct a drain across our parking lot to drain their lot from South to North to Parkway, and another line to drain the property from East to West and dig a drain ditch to the West of our lot, running South to North. The neighbors still protested. They wanted us to be forced to give them half our property and have room for only twenty cars instead of forty, and to plant double evergreens. The cost for the plantings described was to be \$3,600.00. Finally, someone sensible on Zoning Board of Appeals said they thought our offer was very generous and also reasonable, and that other property owners all pay for their own draining and planting along their property lines. We were at least granted our appeal.

Then we were required to go to another Planning Commission meeting to present all final plans, and we were granted permission to finish our lot. By this time it was the end of August, 1986, the week our grading work was to be done. The rain started. It rained for 27 days in a row in Michigan, a new record. Our parking lot and the neighbors' lot was much too wet for the machines to work on them. (We also had been directed to give these neighbors some fill dirt for their yard and rough grade it in.) Our work was supposed to be completed by CZN/DNR by the end of September. All of our money for landscaping around our telephone area was going to be used (and more) to pay for the planning along the neighbors' lot and all the drainwork. It was still raining and the truck could not get into work.

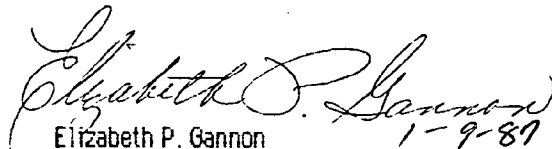
Another thing came up. The Coast Guard donated to the Grosse Ile Historical Society the original special reflecting prism lights that had actually been used in the lighthouse buoys. (Now they use computer lights.) These would require special wiring underground from the Customs House to both buoys from East to West at a cost of \$1,495.00. This needed to be done before the grading was finished on the parking lot, so the Historical Society Board of Directors voted to pay for this work. Actually, the electrical contractor donated his services as an "in kind" match, so we contracted to pay \$675.00 for materials, and wiring labor, and trenching, and permit, plus the cost of a crane to install these huge buoys on the foundation, and special marine paint to refurbish the buoys. Because of our cost overruns and weather delays, I wrote another grant request from CSN/DNR for an extension of time to complete work and also an additional grant of \$3,600.00 which we would match "in kind" with donated time and money. We were awarded this grant on September 28, 1986, and our time was extended to November 30, 1986, with 45 additional days to complete our report.

We have had all our landscaping work done, including a beautiful brick sidewalk, as shown in original plans, landscaping around telephone pole area, restraining of Customs House, repair and restraining of fencing, and parking lot in place and usable, with a final grading job to be done next June 1987, when it has packed down over the winter and spring.

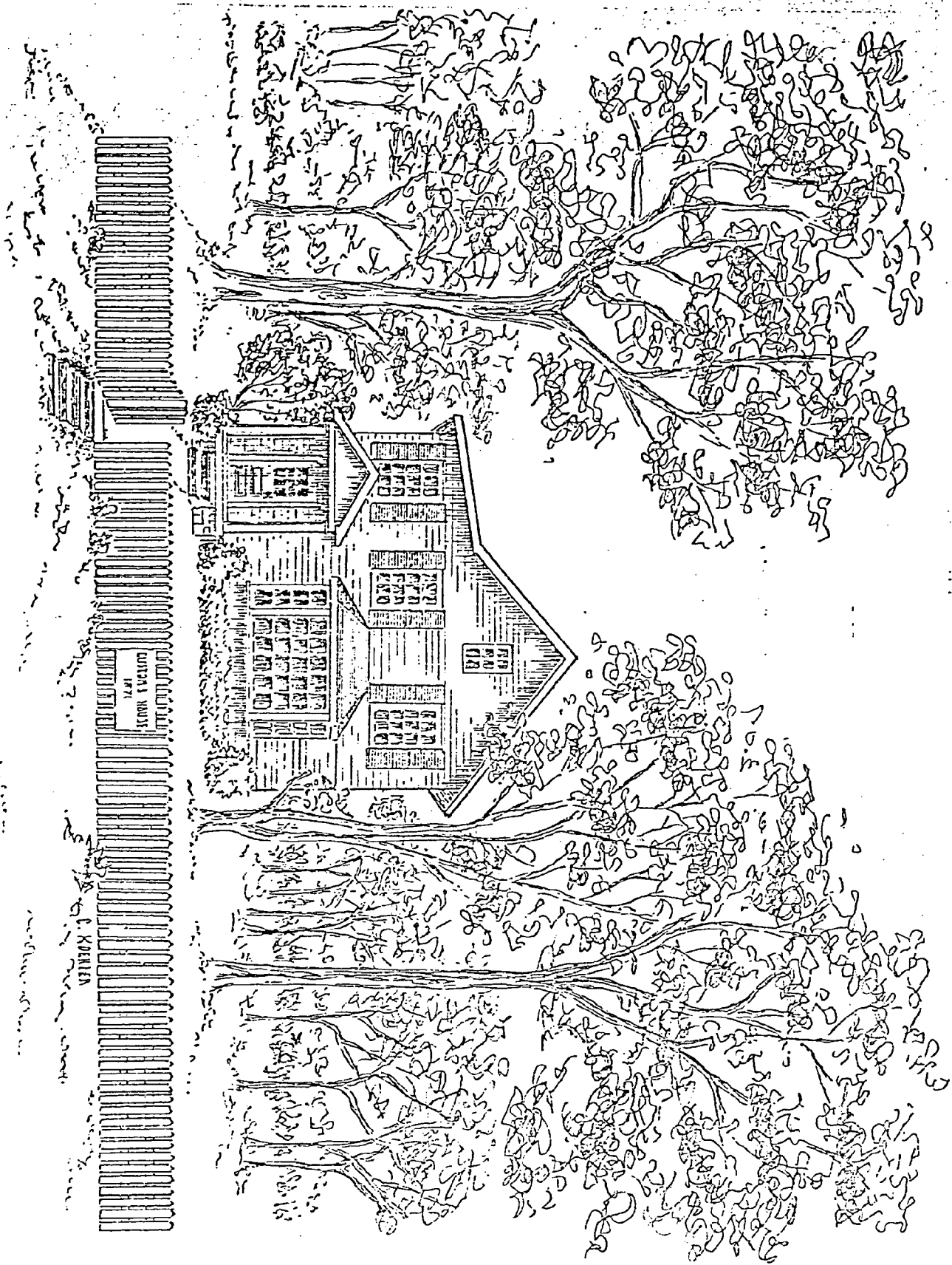
Our lighthouse buoys are in place, and the lights are operated from a switch in the Customs House kitchen, which faces the parking lot on the West side of the house. Paint has been purchased, and weather permitting, they will be given a protective coat of marine paint. The foundations and wiring for the lighthouse buoys could not be put in until the parking lot grading, fill, draining, and graveling were completed.

Our project has been completed and we are all very pleased with the results. In the spring, the regrading will be done. Also, we will install donated railroad ties (already promised) for the 40 new parking spaces, and two metal poles, and a chain with the sign for the Historical Museum hours. We will only allow parking for Historical Society use as recommended by the Grosse Ile Planning Commission.

We are so appreciative of the efforts of Jeanette Bailey of the Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Zone Management, State of Michigan. Your interest, encouragement, and attention to our program have made it a pleasure to work on the grant program with you. Thank you for all of your efforts on our behalf.



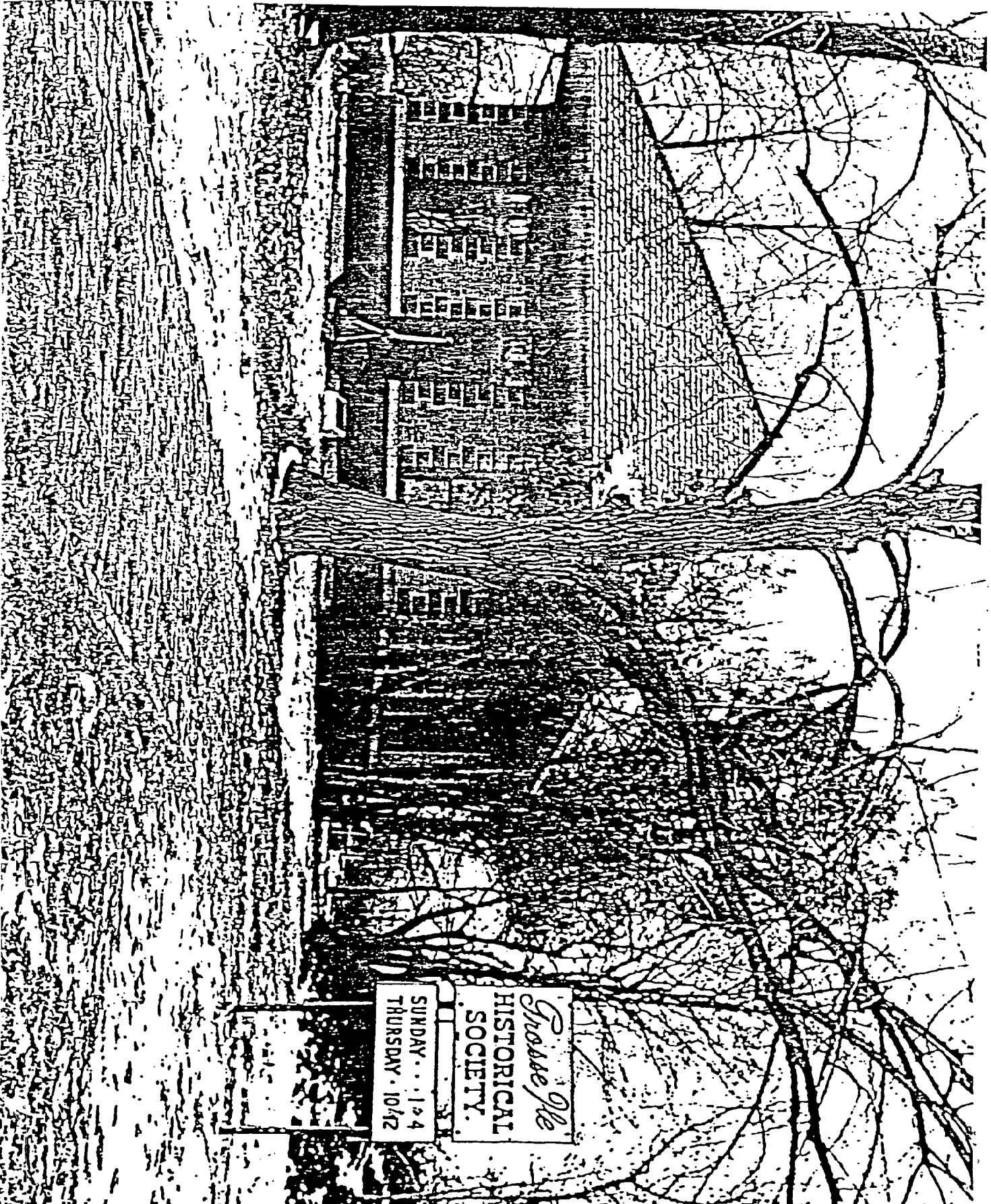
Elizabeth P. Gannon
Past President and
Chairman of Forward Planning
Board of Directors,
Grosse Ile Historical Society
1984-1986



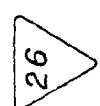
COUNTRY HOUSE
1871

L. KOENIG

Grosse Ile
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY.
SUNDAY • 1:34
THURSDAY • 10/12



1



SOUTH LINE OF PRIVATE CLAIM	552
NORTH LINE OF PRIVATE CLAIM	551



Spring 1966, "BEFORE", view of proposed parking lot



NW corner of parking lot showing neighbors
sump pump draining onto property.



Grading in progress. Water not yet in



NW corner of parking lot, as yet, uncompleted
July, 1976

BEFORE
PHOTOS
8E-1.3
Grosse
Ile
Customs
House



Restained Customs House, landraged powerpole + new walkway



Lighthouse Buoy in place

AFTER Photos, 8E-1.3
Grosse Ile Customs House

New parking lot (final grading to be done in 1987, after
settling + at Society's expense).
New berm for
neighbors privacy + the other Lighthouse Buoy

PROPERTY LINE

NEW CONC. FDN FOR LIGHTHOUSE

EXIST. TOP OF BANK

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

WILKINSON AND SON MUSEUM PARKING ONLY

NEW CONC. FDN FOR LIGHTHOUSE

EXIST. TOP OF BANK

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

20' - 9' PARKING

ADDITIONAL PARKING LOT

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

19' - 9' PARKING SPACES = 171

NOTE: PROVIDE SHALLOW SWALE TO DIVERGENT SURF PUMP DRAINAGE TO ROADWAY DITCH

NEW EVERGREENS @ 6' O.C. TO BE PLANTED BY OWNER

62' OF PARKING LOT PAVING

OLD DEPOT SUBDIVISION

34' THICK OCCIDENTAL NICKEL PLANT 5' ON CENTER 1'-2" INDENT OF PROPERTY LINE ON AN INTERMITTENT BASIS TO INSURE DRAINAGE AND ADEQUATE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANTING CONSIDERATION. A DRAINAGE PIPE WILL BE PLACED 34' FROM THE PROPERTY LINE RUNNING PARALLEL TO THE 34' THICK AND ONE PLACED PERPENDICULAR ACROSS THE PARKING LOT.

EAST LINE OF OLD DEPOT SUB

FINAL REPORT

GROSSE ILE CUSTOMS HOUSE

LRP 8E-1.3

Final Report

8E-1.3

A HISTORY OF THE CUSTOMS HOUSE AND THE GROSSE ILE HISTORICAL SOCIETY Elizabeth P. Gannon

The Grosse Ile Historical Society is located on the site of the old Canadian Southern Railroad property, later owned by Michigan Central Railroad, on the corner of Parkway Road (the former bed of the railroad track) and East River Road. We are situated facing Canada, our neighbor to the East, on Grosse Ile island at the South end of the Detroit River where it enters Lake Erie. Grosse Ile was a summer hunting ground for the Patowammi Indians and afforded access to the Detroit River and Canada. LaMothe de La Cadillac considered Grosse Ile as his site for the new Fort Detroit and admired the property so much that he claimed ownership for himself and left the land to his daughter, Margarete, in his last will and testament. He decided that an island would too soon run out of wood for fuel and so changed his plans to build the fort here and selected the site further North on the river, which is now the center of downtown Detroit. Cadillac fell out of favor with Louis XIV and was transferred to New Orleans about eight years after establishing the Fort in Detroit in 1701. Grosse Ile remained under French rule until 1760 when they surrendered Detroit and this area to Major Robert Rogers and his Rangers.

On July 6, 1779, Alexander and William Macomb bought Grosse Ile from the Potawatomi Indians. Development of the island was delayed because of the Revolutionary War. In 1783, the Treaty of Paris placed Grosse Ile on the American side of the international bounday, but the British did not leave Detroit and continued in possession of that village and Grosse Ile as well as other land in the west. On July 11, 1796, the British evacuated Detroit, and Grosse Ile came under United States rule. The last Indians to live on the island in encampment, were induced to leave, although we do have descendants of those Indians still living and working on Grosse Ile. The survey by Aaron Greeley for the United States in 1808 established the Macomb title for the land. Because of the contining problems with the British and the Indians, a fort was built on East River Road, not far from the Historical Society property, in 1815, to protect the island. The stockade was abandoned in 1819.

The Macomb brothers began selling some of their land, roads were laid out and farmers began working the land. At that time the only way to Grosse Ile was by boat or ferry. A number of docks on the East, West, North and South of the island were built to accomodate increasingly larger vessels. Schools and churches were established. One historic church stands close to the Historical Society property. It is the St. James Episcopal Chapel, built initially because of the bequest of a black woman, Lizette Dennison, who was born to slavery, became free, and worked all her life for the prominent Biddle family of New York, Washington, and Wyandotte. The chapel was consecrated on July 9, 1868. This is always included on our historic tours around the island, and is well-known for its beautiful Tiffany Glass window.

In 1871, the Canadian Southern Railroad built bridges to Grosse Ile from the United States mainland, and thence to Stony Island for the purpose of bringing cattle, goods and passengers from West of Chicago to New York, through Canada. The cars were ferried from Stony Island to the Canadian shore. They built a Customs House, a railroad station, boarding houses for workmen and visitors and numbers of outbuildings necessary to the maintenance of the Line.

Because of the treacherous ice at this point in the river, the line proved unprofitable so the business was moved North to Detroit and Canadian Southern sold their holding to Michigan Central Railroad. Michigan Central did not need a Customs House so it was moved over to Macomb Street, about a mile away, directly through the farmers fields. There it served as a Pool Hall, a Barber Shop, a Boarding House, and Ice Cream Parlor and legend has it also as a house of ill repute for a short time.

Michigan Central tore down the original train station and built a new one up off the tracks on a hill in 1901.

In the late nineteenth century Grosse Ile became a fashionable place for the well-to-do of Detroit to spend their summers. The train came to the Island in the morning and evening so the business men could take it to work in Detroit while their families enjoyed the water and society of Grosse Ile. There were several fine hotels erected and in 1899 a golf course was laid out and a Casino built. This was in the area of the Historic District. Transportation at that time was by horse-driven carriages or buses and often bob-sleds were used when the roads were covered with snow. Ownership of the property and train station reverted to Wayne County. In 1924, passenger service was discontinued by the railroad and later the railroad bridge and the railroad bed were converted into the Wayne County Free Bridge and the Parkway Road. The Train Station was used for a number of purposes including a sub-police station, a school house and Water Supply Commission.

The automobile became very popular so in 1913 the Grosse Ile Toll Bridge was opened to traffic on Thanksgiving Day at the North end of the Island. This bridge is still in use.

In 1959 the Grosse Ile Historical Society was formed and after several years, persuaded Grosse Ile Township and Wayne County, to allow them to lease the property for \$1.00 per year plus extensive insurance coverage for the County. At that time the Station had fallen into a dreadful state of neglect and disrepair. With a great deal of effort and donations, the charming Station (started in 1901) was restored and became the center of Historical Society activities and efforts. The marvelous collection housed in this building has been commended by the Michigan State Historical Society as outstanding because it is a collection of memorabilia concerning life and times on Grosse Ile, not just a collection of old things. The collection became so extensive that we ran out of room and began to decline acquisitions. We searched for ways to obtain more display room. An architect designed a building that would have cost well over \$100,000.00. In 1976 we raised \$30,000.00 for a new building, but even with matching grants this would not cover the cost of a new building.

Then in 1978, when I became President of Historical Society after serving on the Board of Directors for several years, Historical Society was offered a building which was then being used by Peoples Bank and Trust for a temporary office while they built a new modern bank building. Through the years preceeding this event, the actual history and background of the building had been forgotten. When the building was offered we began to research this functional but ordinary looking building which had been unfortunately "modernized" through the years. It was covered with asbestos shingles, aluminum awnings, contemporary aluminum windows, etc. Our then local newspaper editor, Meg Bremmer Jones, investigated and discovered that this was the Old U.S. Customs House that had been moved from the Railroad Property to the site on Macomb Street. We had oral history and a letter from the daughter of a woman 103 years old who remembered the building on the original site and when it had been moved, when she was a little girl. Historical architects and builders investigated the construction to confirm the age of the building, and that it had been moved. In our restoration we revealed the original cedar siding, removed the "modernization" and exposed a charming nineteenth century building, which we eventually restored using comparable buildings of Grosse Ile as our guide, and with the help of our architect, Mr. John Lee. The Board of Directors voted to accept the building if the \$30,000.00 previously raised would be allowed to be used to help move the building back to its original site on the hill above the original Canadian Railroad track site, now converted to Parkway Road.

It was also necessary to obtain permission from Wayne County to extend our Lease holding to include this property and a parking area, build a foundation and place the Customs House on the grounds of the Historical Society land. The property was already registered as a State of Michigan and a National Historic Site.

The building had been abused and "modernized". I contacted the office of then Governor Milliken and through their help make contact with Department of Natural Resources Coastal Zone Management and then Senator James DeSana. With the help of these three offices in Michigan State Government, we received Grant money to provide for the services of Ayres, Lewis and May, Architects, for historical drawings for the restoration of the Customs House. We also received funds for the foundation on which to set the building after the move, which had to be made within three months. Also it was necessary to somehow make contact with the elusive Wayne County Road Commission, then under the administration of Michael Berry. Contact with Mr. Berry was made and permission to present our request for additional land and erection of the Customs House was given. U.S. Customs had a directive issued to assist in the preservation of Customs Houses with the help of the Director of U.S. Customs in Detroit, Lou Mazzano, a business contact of my husband. This was accomplished within three weeks after being given the Customs House. I presented our proposal to the full monthly meeting of the Wayne County Road Commission Board and did not receive their permission but I was able to persuade them to take the proposal under consideration. Within a month, after many phone calls, letters, home-made Rum cakes, etc., I finally again received permission to appear before their Board and at that time Wayne County Road Commission did agree to lease the extra land to us and allow the Customs House to be moved there. The Grosse Ile Township Board, which is largely Republican, while Wayne County was largely Democratic, were amazed that this was accomplished. Actually, I found the Road Commission very cooperative when they realized that Grosse Ile Historical Society is completely non-partisan and only trying to accomplish something that would be of benefit to Grosse Ile, Wayne County and the State of Michigan. This we have proven to be true. Our yearly attendance has increased steadily during the following years. I found all the offices mentioned above to be most gracious, cooperative and willing to go out of their way to help diligently to see our projects completed as projected.

On our own we raised additional money and with that, the Grant from DNR/CZM, some Grosse Ile Township Revenue Sharing and a great deal of volunteer labor and effort, we were able to dedicate the completed Customs House in October of 1980. Membership in Historical Society is now around 350. Our only income is from dues and the rental of an apartment on the second floor of the Customs House, and rental of our building for parties and craft sales. We also make money doing bus tours of our buildings and other Historical sites on Grosse Ile, using the services of our volunteer members. With these funds we maintain our two buildings, pay a considerable fee for insurance and service the community with tours. These tours include all the fourth grade classes from the Grosse Ile School and many from Trenton schools as well. These children then give reports of their experience. We average at least fourteen bus tours (50 people per bus) a year. We are open every Sunday except during January and February and on holidays, for exhibition to the general public. We also offer research privileges for individual or group projects.

In March of 1985, I applied again to the Department of Natural Resources Coastal Zone Management for a grant to enlarge our parking facilities to accomodate 40 cars since we have become quite popular as a tour site. Also when we have special programs, the general public has had to park illegally along the road in order to attend. We also needed to re-stain the Customs House, as recommended by the original architectural firm to do after the first five years. We also had two Detroit River Lighthouse Buoys, which had been in service since the end of the Nineteenth Century, donated to our collection. These buoys needed foundations and a site. We also needed funds for landscaping, plants, material and fencing repair in the parking lot area, plus costs of profes-

sional drawings by an engineering firm to meet Grosse Ile Township codes for the parking lot. The estimated costs for these projects was \$15,500.00. We were delighted that our request was granted, with a 50% match to our 50% cash and "in kind" services.

The original plan was to move a Detroit Edison power pole that is situated in the middle of our original parking area, creating almost an "island," severely limiting our use of the parking area. The cost for this move would have been \$3,500.00. After an inspection by CZM/DNR, it was suggested that we extend our projected parking area to the West and landscape the Power Pole area to continue the existing garden on the West side of the building. I again contacted Wayne County, which had reorganized the Road Commission into Wayne County Roads, Parks and Planning.

After many telephone calls and letters I at last made contact with Ms. Nancy Watkins, chief of Parks and Planning. Wayne County is divesting itself of some of its holding and we have been able to negotiate the transfer of actual ownership of the Historical Society leased property, and additional property all the way West to Old Depot Siding Road, to the Grosse Ile Historical Society. We will actually own, instead of lease, approximately 1000 feet of property extending from East River Road to Old Dept Siding, along Parkway Road, the former bed of the old railroad tracks, and now one of the busiest and most attractive roads on Grosse Ile.

Since Grosse Ile Township officials refused to handle the paper work and money for the Grant, CZM/DNR agreed that it could be handled by the President, Dr. Dimitry Turin, and myself, Elizabeth Gannon, Chairman of Forward Planning, and past President, Board of Directors, Grosse Ile Historical Society. The Official Reports were to be made quarterly.

In the first quarter (January to March 30, 1986) we had conferences with Grosse Ile Township Administrator, Mr. Feccho; with the Wayne County Road Department, Mr. Oakley; with Mr. William Heinrich, Marine Engineer, regarding placement of Light Channel Buoy Markers; Michigan Foundation for the parking lot work; took bids from professional painters, ordered and received paint, brushes, etc.; conferred with the Grosse Ile Garden Club and made arrangements for them to repair and stain existing fencing and work on gardens now existing; had a conference with Mr. Charles Raines on the site to have Certified drawings made of parking lot and placement of the Lighthouse buoys; arrange for publicity in local papers, and conferred often with Ms. Jeannette Bailey of CZM/DNR regarding administration of Grant. Our original plan was to have volunteer painters from the Lions Club do the staining, using scaffolding. We later decided that it was safer to just hire professional painters to do the work. The actual cost of \$300.00 offset the cost of renting the scaffolding. The painter donated "in kind" services valued at \$250.00. The Grosse Ile Lions Club agreed to stain the lower part of the building with our stain. Later they decided instead to donate \$500.00 to Historical Society to pay a professional painter to complete all the re-staining, including shutters and porches, using our stain, purchased at cost from N.A. Mans. They donated the difference in retail price as part of our "in kind" match.

The charge for the drawing from Charles Raines Engineering Co. was \$500.00. We paid an additional \$250.00 to have survey stakes put in for final grading.

The estimate for the entire new parking lot, gravel, grading, fill, regarding existing lot between the Customs House and the Old Train Depot and regarding one long driveway from East River and enlarging another driveway from Parkway was \$10,000.00. We received an "in kind" gift of fill and trucking of \$3,000.00 from Ron Davidson of American Concrete Breaking, an affiliate of Michigan Foundation, and the actual cost of the work to us was \$7,000.00. We are withholding \$500.00 of Historical Society funds from American Concrete Breaking, with their agreement, so that they will give us a final grading job in June of 1987 as recommended by the Grosse Ile Town-

ship Building Inspector, Mr. Sligay, and two engineers who are volunteers for the Historical Society. This is necessary because of the unusual record-breaking amount of rain (27 days in a row) in September 1986, creating soggy land. This will firm up during the winter and spring to a nice hard surface. All of this property has special drains installed to let water from adjoining property, flowing onto our property, drain off to the main road drain along Parkway Road to our North.

In the second quarter, April 1 to June 30, we continued our conferences with Jeanette Bailey, the Township, Wayne County, met with Nancy Watkins of Wayne County, Bill Heinrich, Marine Engineer who agreed to donate his services to supervise the installation of the two lighthouse buoys; the Garden Club, the painters, and landscaping men. Since we already had a permit for our parking lot from our work before, we instructed Mr. Ron Davidson to begin our fill, gravel, and grading work per specifications on Mr. Raines' drawings.

At that point, our adjoining neighbors objected to the Township because actually they did not want us to have a parking lot. They still had not moved in to the new house they were having built to our south property line. They seemed to think that the property should be for them to look at or use, since they thought it belonged to Wayne County, not knowing that it was leased to the Historical Society and actually in the legal process of being transferred to us as owners. The actual site of our parking lot has been used as a parking area since the 1950's when the original lessee was Mr. Gronda, who operated a boat livery along the Detroit River off East River Road. There is still an old sign nailed to the Catalpa tree at the far West end of our new parking lot that says, "for Boat Livery parking only."

Another of the neighbors' complaints was that our parking lot would not allow their property to drain properly. Their house is the lowest in the new subdivision. They claim that our lot caused water to stand on their lot. We discovered that they actually had a sump pump that came from their basement directly to our property line that on a regular basis pumped water onto our property. They did have water standing on their lot. (See enclosed pictures of their sump pump drain to our lot.)

Because of the neighbors' objections, the Township put a stop work order on our project, and it was necessary for us to go to the Planning Commission to request permission for another permit to install our new parking lot. We had quite a time at the meeting. The neighbors gathered all their adjoining neighbors who came to the meeting to try to prevent us from having a parking lot at all. They complained about our bus tours, lights, etc. Actually, we are very good neighbors. We keep our property in perfect, neat, and attractive condition. Our lawns and gardens are tended properly and our buildings are kept in good repair. We allow no trash to accumulate, etc. We perform a desirable service and are much respected by the entire community of Grosse Ile except for our adjoining neighbors. Of course, we were there way before any of those neighbors purchased their property, so it was no secret that we operated a museum and needed parking facilities. After much talking, threats by the neighbors of an injunction in Circuit Court, etc., reason prevailed with the Planning Commission and we were granted a new permit. However, Grosse Ile code required a business lot to be paved with concrete or asphalt which would have cost way more than we could have ever afforded to match in a grant. So we had to arrange to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals. Again, the neighbors mobilized, but we did too. We requested a letter from DCN/DNR encouraging the Board of Appeals to grant us the variance. We also arranged for Ms. Watkins, Director of Wayne County Parks, to appear to testify in our behalf. The neighbors had been extremely abusive to me personally at the first meeting and tried to be intimidating at this one.

We were granted the variance appeal but then the neighbors still complained to the Board of Appeals because there existed another public parking code that required a six and one-half foot fence adjoining private property for a business parking lot. The neighbors were delighted. First, they knew we did not have enough money for the block fence, 170 feet long, and second, they knew we would not think that this would be attractive. The neighbors said they insisted on the block fence to the Planning Commission, and in private conference with Dr. Turin and myself, said that after the fence was built, they would spray graffiti all over it if we did get it built. Our original plans for the parking lot included planting evergreen Arborvitae along our neighbors' adjoining line as we did along the original parking area where we adjoined.

The neighbors said that the evergreen Arborvitae, planted at a height above car lights, would not be enough to screen their back yards from lights. We probably have five meetings a year when the lights might shine into their yard between 7:30 and 10:00 p.m., way less that if we were private residential property with drivers going in and out every day. Finally, at the second Board of Appeals meeting, after many drawings and bids, we offered to plant on a three foot drained berm, six foot high evergreen Arborvitae along the inside of our line and construct a drain across our parking lot to drain their lot from South to North to Parkway, and another line to drain the property from East to West and dig a drain ditch to the West of our lot, running South to North. The neighbors still protested. They wanted us to be forced to give them half our property and have room for only twenty cars instead of forty, and to plant double evergreens. The cost for the plantings described was to be \$3,600.00. Finally, someone sensible on Zoning Board of Appeals said they thought our offer was very generous and also reasonable, and that other property owners all pay for their own draining and planting along their property lines. We were at least granted our appeal.

Then we were required to go to another Planning Commission meeting to present all final plans, and we were granted permission to finish our lot. By this time it was the end of August, 1986, the week our grading work was to be done. The rain started. It rained for 27 days in a row in Michigan, a new record. Our parking lot and the neighbors' lot was much too wet for the machines to work on them. (We also had been directed to give these neighbors some fill dirt for their yard and rough grade it in.) Our work was supposed to be completed by CZN/DNR by the end of September. All of our money for landscaping around our telephone area was going to be used (and more) to pay for the planning along the neighbors' lot and all the drainwork. It was still raining and the truck could not get into work.

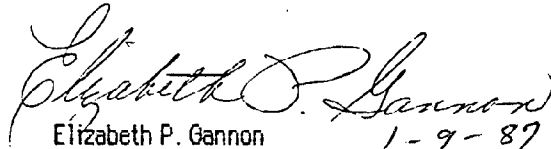
Another thing came up. The Coast Guard donated to the Grosse Ile Historical Society the original special reflecting prism lights that had actually been used in the lighthouse buoys. (Now they use computer lights.) These would require special wiring underground from the Customs House to both buoys from East to West at a cost of \$1,495.00. This needed to be done before the grading was finished on the parking lot, so the Historical Society Board of Directors voted to pay for this work. Actually, the electrical contractor donated his services as an "in kind" match, so we contracted to pay \$675.00 for materials, and wiring labor, and trenching, and permit, plus the cost of a crane to install these huge buoys on the foundation, and special marine paint to refurbish the buoys. Because of our cost overruns and weather delays, I wrote another grant request from CSN/DNR for an extension of time to complete work and also an additional grant of \$3,600.00 which we would match "in kind" with donated time and money. We were awarded this grant on September 28, 1986, and our time was extended to November 30, 1986, with 45 additional days to complete our report.

We have had all our landscaping work done, including a beautiful brick sidewalk, as shown in original plans, landscaping around telephone pole area, restaining of Customs House, repair and restaining of fencing, and parking lot in place and usable, with a final grading job to be done next June 1987, when it has packed down over the winter and spring.

Our lighthouse buoys are in place, and the lights are operated from a switch in the Customs House kitchen, which faces the parking lot on the West side of the house. Paint has been purchased, and weather permitting, they will be given a protective coat of marine paint. The foundations and wiring for the lighthouse buoys could not be put in until the parking lot grading, fill, draining, and graveling were completed.

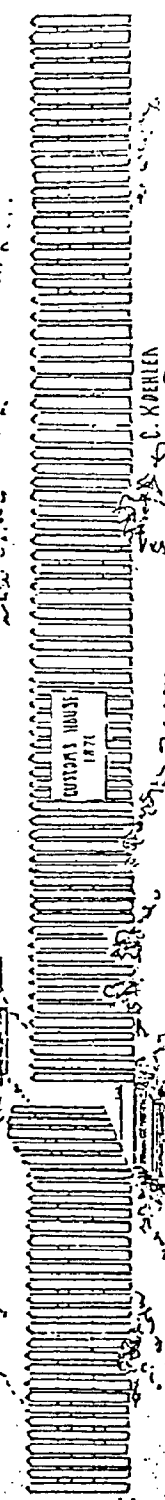
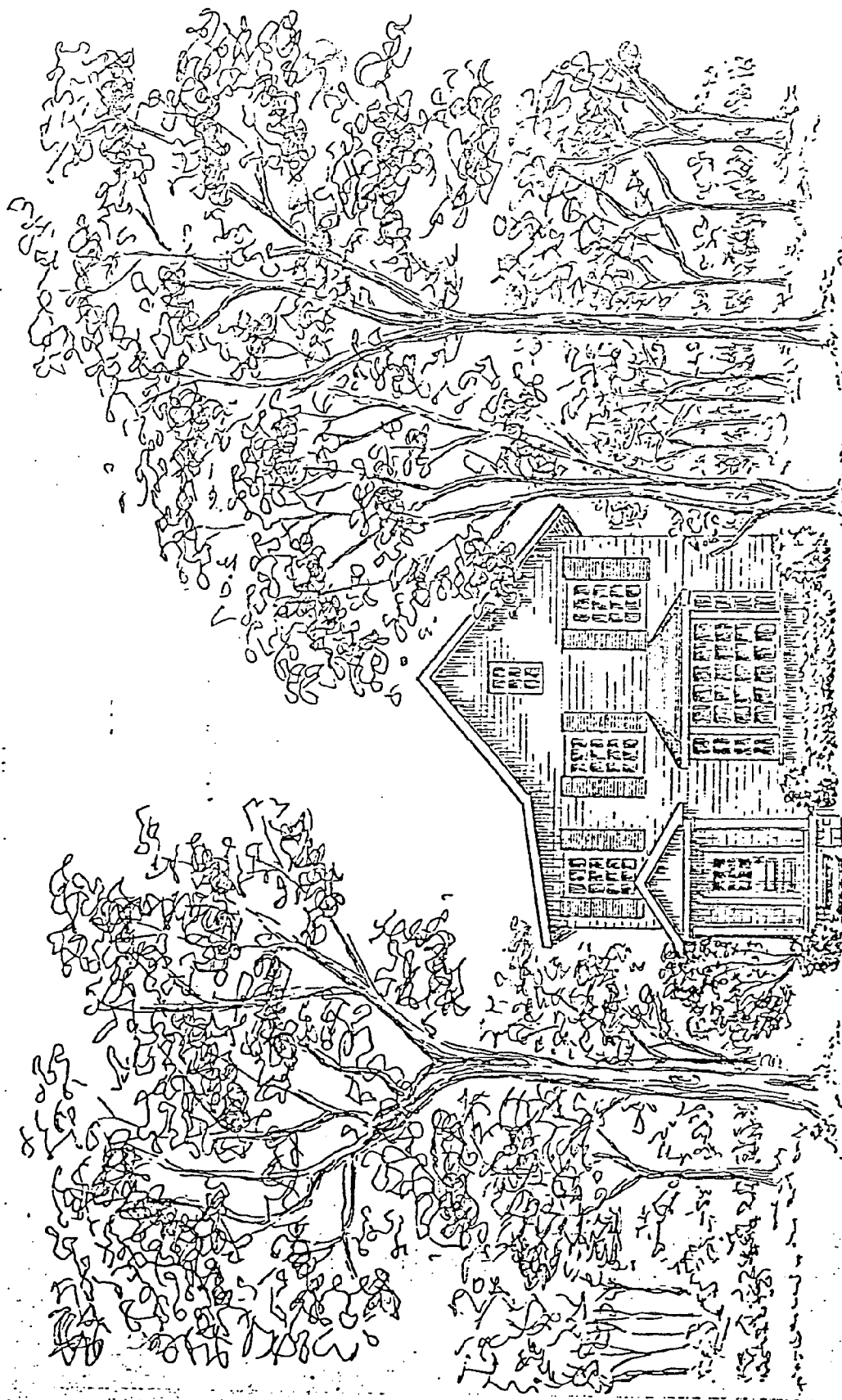
Our project has been completed and we are all very pleased with the results. In the spring, the regrading will be done. Also, we will install donated railroad ties (already promised) for the 40 new parking spaces, and two metal poles, and a chain with the sign for the Historical Museum hours. We will only allow parking for Historical Society use as recommended by the Grosse Ile Planning Commission.

We are so appreciative of the efforts of Jeanette Bailey of the Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Zone Management, State of Michigan. Your interest, encouragement, and attention to our program have made it a pleasure to work on the grant program with you. Thank you for all of your efforts on our behalf.



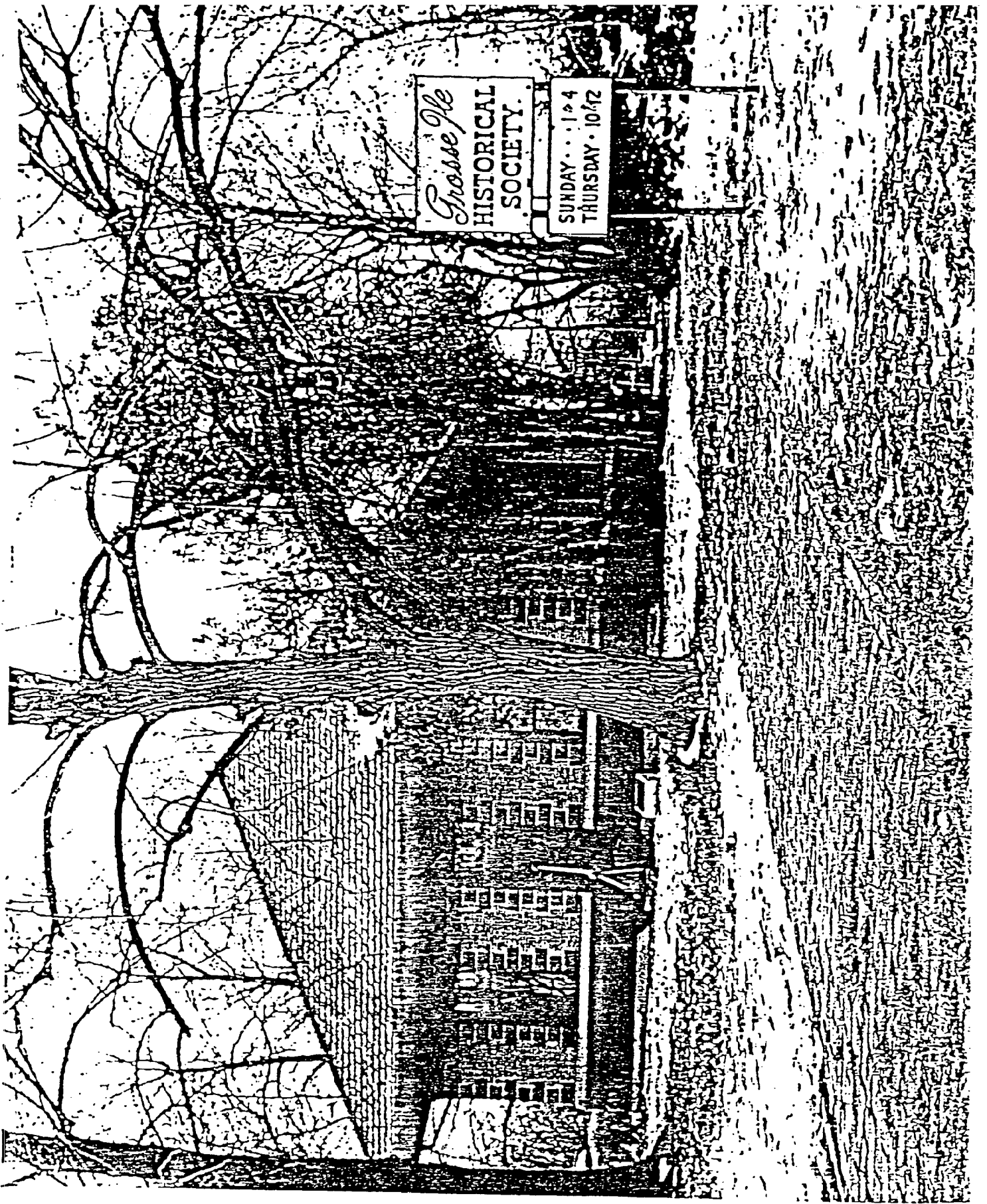
Elizabeth P. Gannon
Past President and
Chairman of Forward Planning
Board of Directors,
Grosse Ile Historical Society
1984-1986

1-9-87



C. K. PERLIN

CUTTING HOUSE
1871



12.28 Ac.

a2a4
TO
a2a40

113

b1b2b,
b2b,b3a

a2a2
a2a3
a2a1

b1b2a2
b2a2

b1b2a1
b2a1
a1b2a
a1b2a
a1b1c
a1b1a
a1b1a
a1a
a1a

PARKWAY

200 FT. WD.

300 a1
b1b,a1b2
15.00 Ac.

PARKE LANE

OLD DEPOT
SUBDIVISION NA2
(552aa) (09)

OLD DEPOT
SUBDIVISION (552x) (08)

STORM VANDERZEE
SUBDIVISION (552m) (04)

SOUTH LINE OF PRIVATE CLAIM 552
NORTH LINE OF PRIVATE CLAIM 552

BELLEVUE RD

EAST RIVER ROAD

U.S. HARBOR LINE

9900A

GROSS

PR
WAN



Spring 1986, "BEFORE", view of proposed parking lot



NW corner of parking lot showing neighbor's sump pump chaining onto property.



grading in progress. markers not yet in



NW corner of parking lot, car parked, uncompleted July, 1986

BEFORE
PHOTOS
8E-13
Grasse
Hill
Cresting
Hillside



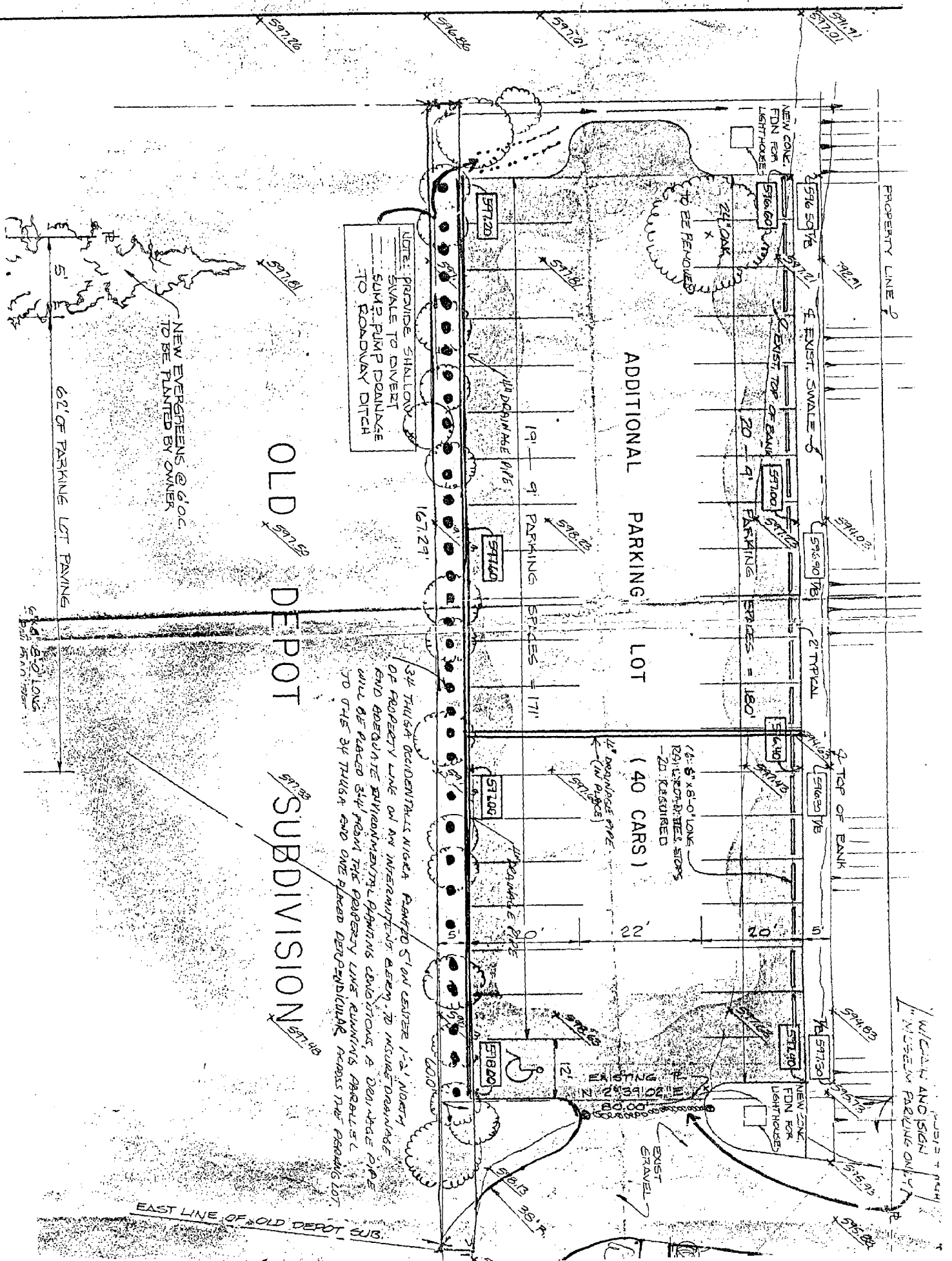
Restained Customs House, handicapped powerpole + new walkway



Lighthouse Buoy in place

AFTER Photos, 8E-1.3
Grosse Ile Customs House

New parking lot (final grading to be done in 1987 after
settling + at Society's expense).
New barn for
neighbors, privacy + the other Light-





"AFTER" PHOTO
GROSSE ILE
CUSTOM HOUSE
198 ?





'AFTER' PHOTO
GROSSE ILE
CUSTOM HOUSE - 198.?





"BEFORE" PHOTO
GROSSE ILE
CUSTOM HOUSE - 1987



"AFTER" PHOTO
GROSSE ILE
CUSTOM HOUSE
198. ?





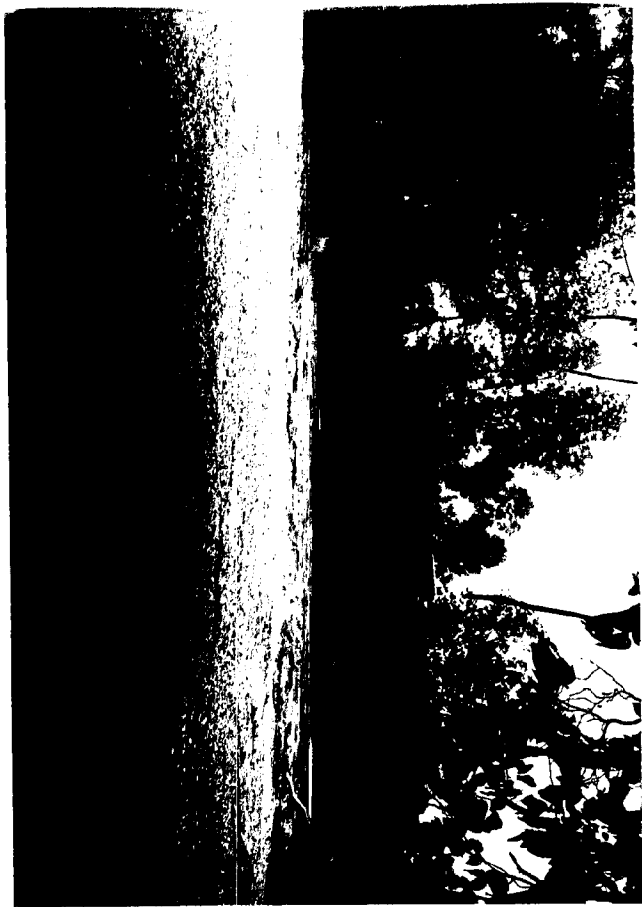
"AFTER"
PHOTO - CUSTOM HOUSE
GROSSE ILE
198 ?

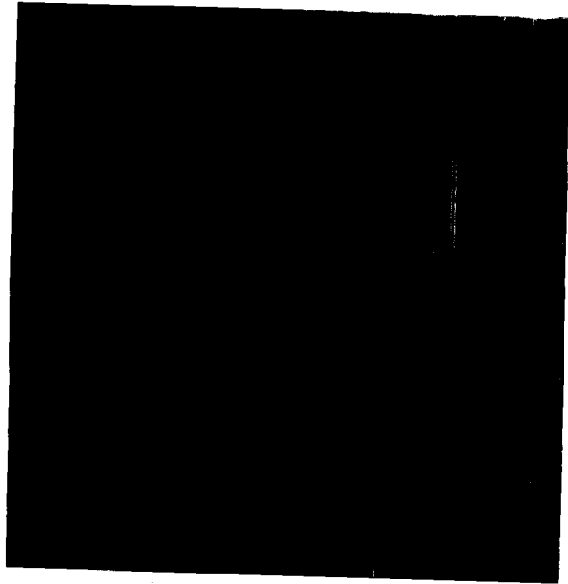




"AFTER" PHOTO
GROSSE ILE
CUSTOM HOUSE
198.?

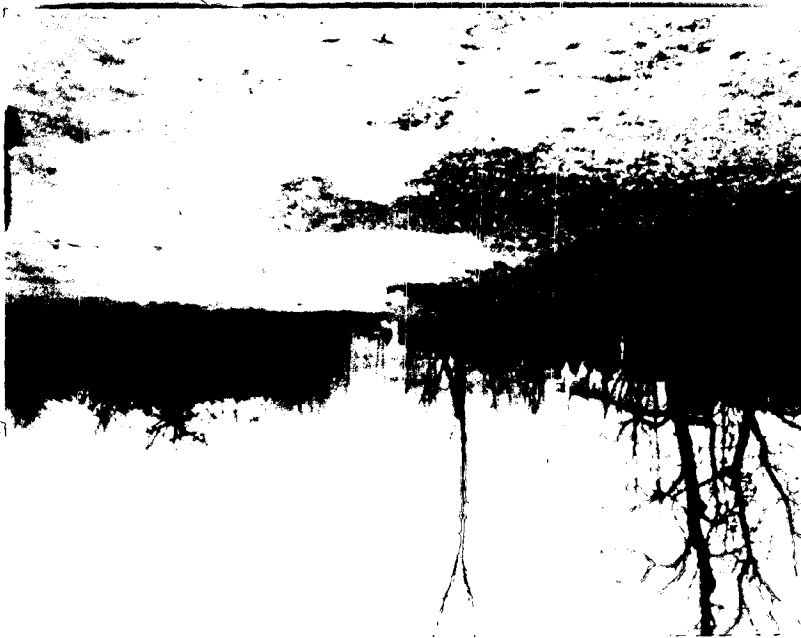


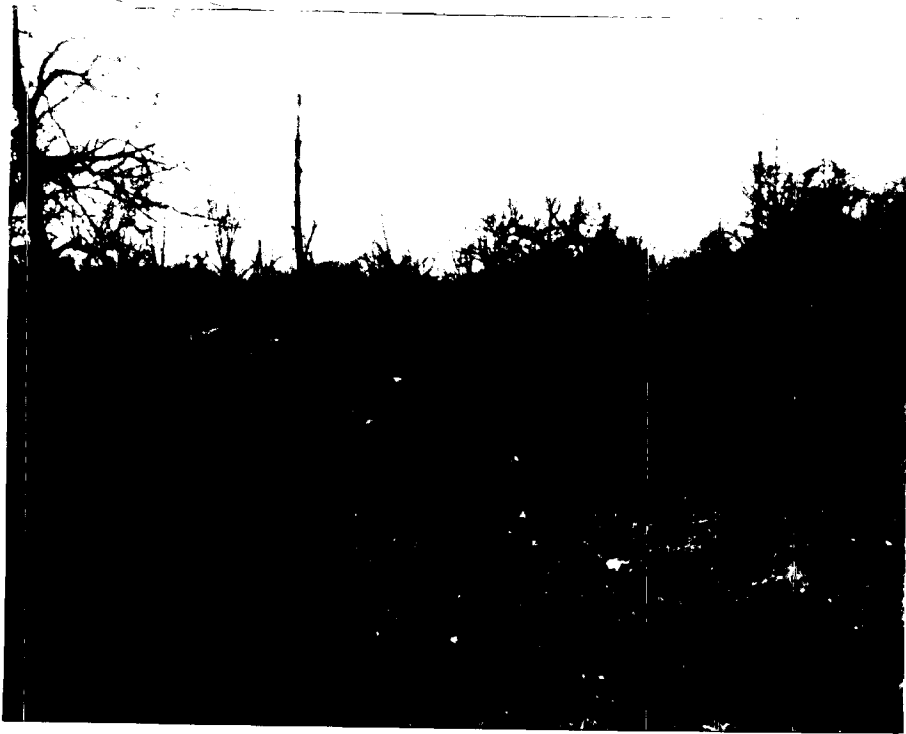




Right side of road #26 C. L. N. Bony-
 with road #25 " " " " " "
 parking lot & new building -
 12/82

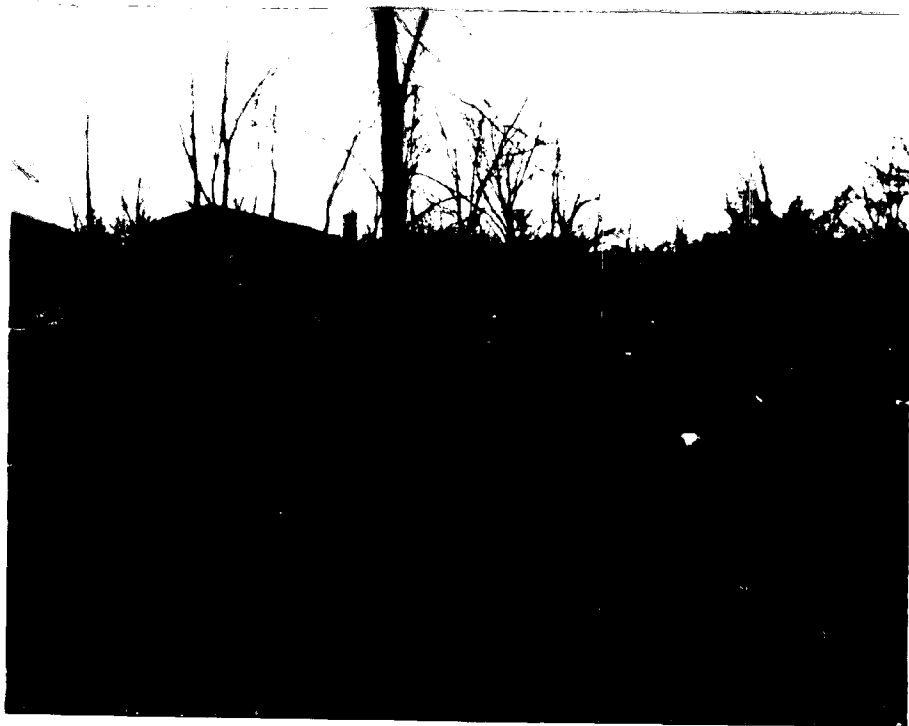
"AFTER" PHOTO
 GROSSE ILE
 CUSTOM HOUSE 1987





"BEFORE" PHOTO
GROSSEILE
CUSTOM HOUSE
198 ?





"BEFORE" PHOTO
GROSSE ILE
CUSTOM HOUSE - 198 ?



NOAA COASTAL SERVICES CTR LIBRARY



3 6668 14111934 9